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ABSTRACT

The Mutually Aided Learning (MAL) program in Cherry Creek School District, Englewood, Colorado, is a special program that high school students take for credit. Planning for the general program began a year before the course was to be taught. The program, now self-supporting, has two major expenses--released time for the elementary and secondary teachers, and transportation for the high school students to the elementary schools. No special teaching materials or building facilities are required. With the cooperation of the high school and elementary teachers, the high school students plan social studies units at the beginning of each six-week period. The major topic is introduced, and the high school students then work with small groups of elementary students to study the topic in depth. Major needs that can be met through MAL are: 1) high school students have more opportunities to apply their knowledge than are usually provided in the secondary curriculum; 2) elementary children receive more individual instruction and begin to learn at a rate nearer to their potential; 3) high school students explore their feelings and attitudes toward working with elementary children; and, 4) the improvement of communications and work relationships between the elementary and secondary schools. Evaluation results indicate that the high school students have a lower absence rate during the semester in MAL; and there is a slight improvement in the overall grade point average for these students. (JLB)

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by

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PROFILES OF PROMISE are descriptive brochures that highlight innovative social studies and social education practices, which teachers and administrators can easily adapt to their own classrooms or schools.

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Cross-Age Teaching in the Social Studies

"In a society which is fast becoming mechanized, the jobs related to helping may in the future outnumber other job possibilities. An opportunity for some apprenticeship in the fields of service to others is an important part of one's education."

From Cross-Age Helping Program,
University of Michigan

THE PROGRAM

The benefits of the Mutually Aided Learning (MAL) program to students and teachers in the Cherry Creek School District, Englewood, Colorado, are impressive. High school students develop a sense of responsibility that has them attending classes faithfully so they can continue to participate in the program; elementary students receive individual attention and establish personal relationships with older students; high school teachers gain a special rapport with their students and a broader insight into the problems of elementary teachers; and elementary teachers receive assistance which frees them to work more closely with students needing personal attention.

Mutually Aided Learning, also known as cross-age teaching, is a special program that high school students take for course credit. The class meets with the teacher on Monday for one hour to plan for the week. On Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday, teaching sessions are conducted in elementary schools in groups consisting of four elementary students and one high school student. Fridays are reserved for feedback and evaluation sessions for the high school students and their teacher.

THE GOALS

Cherry Creek Schools have identified major needs that can be met through MAL. High school students have more opportunities to apply their knowledge than are usually provided in the secondary curriculum. Cross-age teaching requires high school students to begin their work by developing a basic knowledge of social studies. They must also learn methods of teaching this knowledge to children. They then apply this learning through their work with elementary students. The program also provides a much-needed opportunity for high school students to explore their feelings and attitudes toward working with elementary children.

Elementary children receive more individualized instruction and begin to learn at a rate nearer to their potential. The efforts of five or six trained high school students added to those of the elementary teacher allow for more individual attention to the students' learning problems. The high school students also provide realistic teen-age role models that help accelerate the emotional growth of the elementary children.

Another need being met through cross-age teaching is for the improvement of communications and work relationships between the elementary and secondary schools. Secondary and elementary teachers are provided the opportunity to work closely together for the mutual benefit of their students.

High school students work with elementary classes.

THE PLANS

Albert R. Thompson, Coordinator of Special Programs, and James N. Stamper, social studies teacher at Cherry Creek High School, firmly believe that proper planning provides a sense of security when implementing a new program. Thus, they first planned and set goals for the general program. This was followed by planning of the course content of the high school course and of the elementary school program.

Planning for the general program began a year before the course was to be taught; a description of the course and a plan of action with deadlines for each step were written by Thompson and Stamper. All members of the social studies department reacted to the plan for the course, and administrative approval for granting social studies credit to high school students was secured. Presentations were made at school board and parent meetings to secure community and parent support.

The following course description was written for insertion in the high school curriculum bulletin: **"Learn About Learning:** Social Studies Mutually Aided Learning is a unique opportunity for high school students to work with elementary school students for elective and/or social studies credit. If you like kids and would like to add a new dimension to your education, MAL social studies is for you." This description was given to the high school counselors who were asked to register students for the course. Students who indicated an interest were contacted to make sure they were registered.

After the course had been publicized with students, elementary teachers were recruited. Two important qualities were sought in recruiting the elementary teachers: a disposition to accept high school students as instructional assistants, and willingness to work together with the high school teacher. It was important for the elementary teachers to understand that the high school students were not aides who would merely grade papers and serve playground duty, but instructional assistants, trained in subject matter content and teaching methodologies, who could teach elementary students.

Before the program began, the teachers involved gathered to set general goals for the high school and elementary students. The topics or major themes to be explored in the coming year were discussed, and the role each person was to play in the program was clarified. Teaching supplies were ordered and a general schedule of events was developed for the first eight weeks of the program.

The first two or three weeks of school were spent in joint planning activities with high school and elementary teachers and high school students. These activities were designed to give the personnel a chance to get acquainted and to develop satisfactory working relationships. During this time, high school students, working with the elementary and high school teachers, planned the units they would teach in the elementary schools.

Financial planning is a very important aspect of the MAL program. Although originally funded through the Elementary and Secondary Education Act Title III, the program is now self-supporting. The two major expenses are released time for the elementary and secondary teachers and transportation for the high school students to the elementary schools. Cherry Creek issues an extended contract to the teachers for planning the program. The teacher who transports the students is paid 8¢ per mile, and substitutes are hired for the elementary teachers when they attend meetings with the high school students. No special teaching materials or building facilities are required.

THE WORK

With the cooperation of the high school and elementary teachers, the high school students plan social studies units at the beginning of each six-weeks period. These units are implemented in one elementary school classroom, with all of the high school students working together. The major topic is introduced, and the high school students then work with small groups of elementary students to study the topic in depth. This arrangement allows the high schoolers to work with social studies content as well as with teaching strategies. In many cross-age helping programs, the older students work with the younger ones on specific learning difficulties as designated by the elementary teacher. The Cherry Creek program allows for this aspect of cross-age teaching, and adds the additional dimension of subject area teaching.

The choice of units to be taught by the high school students is very important. The needs, backgrounds, and goals of the high school students and the interest areas and ability levels of the elementary students must be taken into account when choosing topics. After the units are chosen, planning sessions for each week's work are held on Monday, and evaluation sessions are conducted on Friday. All sessions include the high school and elementary teachers and the high school students.

An example of the type of units implemented by the high school students is one on political power. After a trip to the Colorado state capitol where the students saw the legislature at work, an elementary teacher suggested that the high school students teach a unit on political power. It was decided that the class they were working with would create an *ad hoc* legislature for the elementary school. Students would be lawmakers and the principal would play the role of governor. The principal agreed to put into effect laws passed by the students if they were practical and beneficial to the school.

Following the plan of organization, general sessions involving all the high school and elementary students were held, followed by individual work sessions with one high school student and three or four elementary students. In these work sessions, the elementary students formed committees which wrote bills on a wide variety of school needs. Other groups refined, added, and subtracted, then sent the bills back to the committee for compromise. A legislative chamber, complete with elected officers, was organized with the high school students serving in an advisory capacity. Some bills were quickly approved and implemented—such as one asking for a choice of chocolate or white milk every day instead of just on Friday. Others were too complex to be implemented over a short period of time, and were held over for the next school year.

New units to be implemented this year include one on economic power. High school students will assist the elementary children in actual participation in various aspects of the economy such as banking, the job market, and the stock market. Also planned is a series of units designed to familiarize elementary students with other cultures. Minorities within the U.S. as well as cultures from other countries will be studied. The culture units will be activity-oriented to promote student involvement.

Cross-age teaching has taken hold. High school students are working closely with elementary students in a mutual learning situation, and both groups are experiencing a sense of self-determination.

THE PEOPLE

The major personnel involved in the MAL program are the secondary teacher, the secondary student, the elementary teacher, and the elementary student. The secondary and elementary school principals are kept informed on the progress of the program.

In the Cherry Creek program, the role of the secondary teacher is extremely important. His duties include advertising and interpreting the program to his fellow teachers, administrators, school board, parents, and community. He also recruits the elementary teachers to work in the program. It is his responsibility to lead and balance the various elements of the program. He accompanies his students to their elementary classes and assists them with problems that arise; often, he is called on to resolve student-student or student-teacher conflicts.

The elementary teacher helps match high school and elementary students, briefs the high school student on the elementary children's unique needs and talents, oversees the teaching sessions, tactfully gives helpful suggestions to the high school students, and is actively involved in planning the program. This planning is an important aspect of the elementary teacher's role, since it is the elementary teacher who is held responsible by the administration and parents for his students' education.

The high school student occupies a critical place in the program. Since cross-age teaching is a course that he takes for credit, he must satisfactorily complete not only his elementary school teaching, but also his class work and feedback meetings. In addition, he must plan his lessons carefully, keeping in mind his own goals as well as those of the elementary teacher and students.

At this point in time, the role of the elementary students has not changed appreciably from the traditional; however, the program directors are beginning to discuss the possibilities of including the elementary students in the curriculum planning by letting them help select the topics to study, thus making them a more integral part of the program.

THE INTERACTION

Every Friday, the high school students and teachers hold sessions to provide feedback and evaluation of the week and to suggest improvements and changes for the week to come. Occasionally guest speakers are invited to discuss educational theories and practices or to review contemporary books of relevance to the program. At other times, these sessions are used for additional training in communication skills.

A high school student seeks assistance from the elementary teacher in explaining materials to her classes.

An elementary teacher is freed to give his students specialized attention.

High school students study the materials they will teach.

For more information

WRITE:

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READ:

Anderson, Ronald D. and Albert R. Thompson. "Mutually Aided Learning: An Evaluation," **Journal of Research in Science Teaching.** Vol. 8. No. 4. 1971. pp. 297-305.

Gartner, Alan **et al. Children Teach Children: Learning by Teaching.** New York: Harper & Row Publishers, Inc., 1971.

Lippitt, Peggy **et al. Cross-Age Helping Program.** Plymouth, Michigan: Maxwell Printing Co., Inc., 1969.

ERIC DOCUMENTS

ED 061 571 - Searchlight: Relevant Resources in High Interest Areas - MF $.65, HC $3.29

ED 061 150 - Tutoring By Students: Who Benefits? - MF $.65, HC $3.29

ED 056 924 - Older-Youngers Project Evaluation: Covering the First Semester - MF $.65, HC $3.29

ED 056 011 - You and Your Charge - MF $.65, HC $3.29

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THE EVALUATION

The Cherry Creek schools employ several evaluation techniques. Each is based on the goals set forth for the program. Techniques for evaluating the total program include discussion of specific problems by teachers and students in feedback sessions. An open-ended questionnaire, in which high school students evaluate the effectiveness of various aspects of the program and make suggestions for improvement, is also used.

Evaluation of high school students is accomplished through a written evaluation of their performance by both the elementary and secondary teachers. Observation and discussion of progress—social as well as academic—of the elementary students is conducted by both the high school students and the elementary teachers.

Teachers, too, are evaluated. High school students write critiques in which they indicate how well their needs are being met by the elementary and secondary teachers.

Evaluation results indicate that the high school students have a lower absence rate during the semester they are in the MAL program. In addition, there is a slight improvement in the overall grade point average for these students. Many of the high school students evidence a significantly different attitude toward teaching as a career at the end of the year than at the beginning. Some students have a more positive attitude while others have a less positive attitude. The MAL staff believes this is good, because it is better for a person to learn that he is not interested in a particular career before entering college rather than after he has invested in preparing for that career.

Informal evaluation by those involved in the program indicates that the high school students are doing an effective job of teaching, and the elementary students have developed good personal relationships with the older students. In addition, cooperation and rapport has been established between teachers and students as well as between the elementary and high school teachers.

THE FUTURE

Mutually Aided Learning was started in the Cherry Creek schools in 1968 with 78 high school students trained to teach art, mathematics, or science to elementary students in five schools. This year, high school students can cross-age teach in fine arts, computers, industrial arts, French, English, mathematics, physical education, science, and social studies.

An evaluator who made an on-site visit to the project concluded his report with these words: "The high schoolers are teachers. What they do during the 46 minutes a day with their charges is teaching in the best sense of the word; it is learning together; it is setting an example—do as I do, experiment, conjecture, doubt, confirm. They should be *called* teachers."

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